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UNIONISM AND RELATIVE WAGES IN THE UNITED STATES

An Empirical Inquiry



H. GREGG LEWIS



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Since 1945 about a third of the wage and salary workers in the United States have been covered by collective-bargaining agreements between labor unions and employers. What has this meant for the wages of these workers compared to the wages of other workers?

Professor Lewis' study attempts to answer four of the most pertinent questions:

By how much have labor unions increased the average wage of union labor relative to that of non-union labor?

How variable were these wage effects of unionism from one date to another during the last four decades? What caused these variations over the years?

How far have labor unions affected in different proportions the average wages of different industries?

Has unionism increased or reduced the relative inequality in average wages among industries and the relative inequality in the distribution of wages among all workers in the labor force?

Mr. Lewis finds that the effect of unions on the average wage of union labor compared to the average non-union wage ranged from 25 per cent or more in the mid-1930's to less than 5 per cent from 1945 to 1949, rising to 10-15 per cent in the late 1950's. The union wage effects have tended to differ considerably among industries.

About the author . . .

H. GREGG LEWIS studied and received his doctorate at the University of Chicago and has been a member of the faculty there since 1939. He is now professor of economics. From 1943 to 1945 he was executive secretary and assistant wage stabilization director of the Sixth Regional War Labor Board. He is co-author (with Paul H. Douglas) of *Studies in Consumer Expenditures* (1947).

This volume is an "Economics Research Study," one in a series prepared by the Department of Economics of the University of Chicago.